

Message Text

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AMCONSUL MUNICH

C O N F I D E N T I A L PRAGUE 2452

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: CVIS, CZ

SUBJECT: DISCUSSION AT MFA ABOUT VOA CORRESPONDENT VISA DENIAL

1. SEPT 19 CHARGE, AT HIS REQUEST, CALLED ON ZANTOVSKY (HEAD OF SIXTH DEPT MFA) TO DISCUSS NON-ISSUANCE OF VISA TO BELGRADE-BASED VOA CORRESPONDENT LARRY FREUND. CHARGE WAS ACCOMPANIED BY ASSISTANT PRESS AND CULTURAL OFFICER. (BELGRADE 4882 HAD REPORTED FREUND'S DENIAL OF VISA, AND MFA PRESS DEPARTMENT HAD CONFIRMED SEPT 18 THAT DENIAL WAS DECISION OF MFA.)

2. ZANTOVSKY'S EXPLANATION OF VISA DENIAL WAS VAGUE, WITH REPEATED REFERENCES TO FACT MFA WAS STILL LOOKING INTO THE MATTER. HE SPOKE ABOUT NEED TO CHECK UP ON "OBJECTIVITY" OF VOA, AND REFERRED TO NYTIMES EDITORIAL OF AUG 12 AS EXAMPLE OF HARMFUL NON-OBJECTIVITY (WHILE AT SAME TIME PRAISING BALANCED NATURE OF CORRESPONDENT MALCOLM BROWNE'S REPORTING FROM PRAGUE). HE ALSO MENTIONED RFE, AND HOW ITS LACK OF "OBJECTIVITY" CAUSED PROBLEMS. AT SAME TIME, HE SAID HE PERSONALLY WELCOMED VISITS BY US JOURNALISTS, AND WANTED SYSTEM TO BE DEvised SO THAT HASSLES OVER EACH INDIVIDUAL CASE COULD BE AVOIDED. ZANTOVSKY ALSO MENTIONED LACK OF IMPROVEMENT IN OVERALL BILATERAL

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RELATIONS, SAYING THAT EASIER GRANTING OF JOURNALISTS'

VISAS WAS PART OF LARGER PICTURE OF IMPROVING RELATIONS. (EMBOFFS FOUND ZANTOVSKY'S LONG COMMENTS DISJOINTED AND UNCONVINCING.)

3. AFTER LONG AND SOMETIMES SHARP DISCUSSION, CHARGE EMPHASIZED THREE POINTS: (A) DENIAL OF FREUND'S VISA ON GROUNDS THAT VOA MIGHT NOT BE "OBJECTIVE" STRUCK HIM AS INDEFENSIBLE, AND REFLECTIVE MOREOVER OF A BASICALLY UNEQUAL SITUATION. SEVERAL PERMANENT CZECH CORRESPONDENTS LIVED IN US, AND US ISSUED VISAS FOR VISITING CZECHOSLOVAK JOURNALISTS PROMPTLY. IN NEITHER CASE DID WE GO INTO "OBJECTIVITY" OF SENDING ORGAN--E.G. KREJCI OF RUDE PRAVO COULD HARDLY BE CALLED IN US TERMS AN OBJECTIVE WRITER FROM AN OBJECTIVE NEWSPAPER. THIS WAS IN CHARGE'S VIEW AN UNRECIPROCAL SITUATION. (B) GOC APPARENTLY MADE FALSE DISTINCTION BETWEEN PERMANENTLY STATIONED JOURNALISTS, WHOM MFA HAD SAID THEY WELCOMED, AND TEMPORARY VISITORS, TO WHOM THEY OFTEN DENIED VISAS ON GROUNDS THEIR NEWSPAPER WAS "UNOBJECTIVE." IN OTHER WORDS THEY WOULD WELCOME A NYTIMES OFFICE IN PRAGUE BUT KEPT THE NYTIMES BELGRADE CORRESPONDENT WAITING A YEAR FOR A VISITORS VISA. (EMBOFF ADDED EXPLANATION THAT MANY US PAPERS AND STATIONS HAD REGIONAL CORRESPONDENTS, TO WHOM CSSR WAS PART OF THEIR BEAT). CHARGE SAID HE FELT THIS WAS ARBITRARY AND FALSE DISTINCTION. (C) DENIAL OF VISA TO CORRESPONDENT OF OFFICIAL US RADIO STRUCK CHARGE AS GOING CLEARLY AGAINST FINAL ACT OF HELSINKI (POINT THREE UNDER "IMPROVEMENT OF WORKING CONDITIONS FOR JOURNALISTS").

4. ON CSCE, ZANTOVSKY REPLIED THAT HELSINKI FINAL ACT CONTAINED "MANY STRAWBERRIES FOR PICKING," AND ENTIRE DOCUMENT NEEDED TO BE FULFILLED, NOT JUST ONE PART. CHARGE AGREED, BUT ADDED THAT DENIAL OF JOURNALIST'S VISA IN HIS PERSONAL OPINION WAS IN VIOLATION OF SPIRIT AND LETTER OF HELSINKI. IF US WAS VIOLATING ANY PROVISIONS OF THE FINAL ACT IN ITS POLICY, HE WAS SURE WE WOULD BE GLAD TO HAVE CONFIDENTIAL

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THAT CALLED TO OUR ATTENTION.

5. BY END OF SEVENTY-MINUTE CONVERSATION, ZANTOVSKY HAD ACKNOWLEDGED THAT SOME POINTS MADE NEEDED LOOKING INTO, AND WAS STRESSING THAT HE HAD JUST BEGUN TO LOOK INTO THE FREUND CASE. DURING TELEPHONE CONVERSATION WITH CHARGE SEPT 22, ZANTOVSKY RETURNED TO SUBJECT AND STRESSED THAT HE

WAS HAVING MATTER LOOKED INTO VERY CAREFULLY.

6. COMMENT. EMBASSY RECOMMENDS GIVING MFA TIME TO CONSIDER FREUND VISA MATTER FURTHER, IN HOPE THAT AFTER DUE REFLECTION THEY WILL ISSUE THE VISA. AT THE SAME TIME, WHATEVER HAPPENS IN THIS CASE, WE BELIEVE THE INEQUITY IN THE PRESENT SITUATION NEEDS TO BE STUDIED AND, ONE HOPES, REMEDIED. SINCE WE ISSUE VISAS TO CZECHOSLOVAK JOURNALISTS ON NOMINAL BASIS OF RECIPROCITY, WE BELIEVE THAT UNLESS IMPROVEMENT IN SITUATION OCCURS, WE SHOULD STUDY INITIATION OF POLICY OF SELECTED VISA DENIALS TO CZECHOSLOVAK JOURNALISTS. ANOTHER POSSIBILITY TO BE STUDIED IS DELIVERING A PROTEST NOTE, IN FREUND CASE OR SOME OTHER, WHICH WOULD BE MADE PUBLIC AND WOULD MAKE KNOWN CSSR VIOLATION, IN US VIEW, OF HELSINKI FINAL ACT. QUESTION OF JOURNALIST VISAS, AS PART OF LARGER ISSUE OF PRESS TREATMENT BY EACH COUNTRY OF THE OTHER, SEEMS TO BE A SUBJECT RIPE FOR HIGH-LEVEL DISCUSSION BETWEEN CZECHS AND OURSELVES.

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